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## THE PROTECTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRANTS

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**T**HE most urgent social needs of New York city, of whatever kind, are closely bound up with the city's immigrant population. This port receives over two-thirds of the total immigration to the country each year, and this number makes its presence felt, either in transit to a final destination out of the city, or through residence, temporary or permanent, in the city.

The mass of the incoming immigrants are poor, illiterate, ignorant of the country and its ways, and afraid of new ventures. Under the contract-labor law, moreover, they cannot secure themselves by definite offers of work which might induce many of them to pass at once through the city to the interior.

In consequence large numbers of the new immigrants linger in the city, for the immediate practical advantages they gain. This city, in particular, both because of and in spite of its crowded population, is the great labor market for the unskilled, and here the newly arrived immigrant finds, as he does not in smaller towns, others of his own kind, who speak his language and know his ways, while they have also become used to the ways of the new country, and are able to give him the first lessons he needs in order to gain a foothold.

Against the immediate material advantages to the immigrant of this lingering in the city, however, must be set the social and moral disadvantages to the immigrant himself, and to the city he is overfilling. A great influx of poor people into a restricted area means bad housing—overcrowding, lack of light and ventilation, lack of privacy, and difficult sanitation—conditions which make strongly toward physical and moral degeneracy. Conditions of labor, though temporarily favorable, are not permanently so. Though employment is easily gained in the big

labor market, the work offered is of a low grade and is likely to be periodic or temporary, while the wages are low. This tends to keep the immigrant a shifting, underpaid laborer, unable to maintain a decent, permanent home.

Moreover, the big foreign colony of a city, while affording a welcome refuge for the new immigrant, has its own evil influences to throw about him. In the colony swarm sharpers of every description, who make their living entirely at the expense of their inexperienced and poverty-stricken countrymen. They meet him at the very port of entry, and begin the fleecing process by outrageous charges for transportation, expressage and hotel accommodations. Then come extravagant charges for procuring the immediate job on which his life depends. Then "bankers" come to the front, ready to absorb the little savings as they begin to accumulate, and convert to their own use what was meant for the helpless family at home, or for the starting of the little business which would give comparative independence. And so on,—the list is endless.

As a result of all these conditions, is it any wonder that the city has to struggle under a considerable burden of foreign dependence and delinquency?

For many years, private agencies have been at work to obviate some of these evils—to protect the immigrant from extortion on his first arrival, to find him employment, and if possible to get him out of the city. Different religious bodies and organizations representing different nationalities have maintained immigrant homes and employment agencies near the landing station, and have had accredited agents at the station to protect helpless newcomers. Some of these societies in their turn having developed abuses of their own have been suppressed by the immigration authorities, and others have taken their place.

With the beginning of the great influx of Hebrews, some twenty years ago, special work in their behalf was started by Jewish philanthropists, and with the coming of the Italians, means of protection and aid were provided especially for them. The most notable large undertaking for the benefit of Hebrew immigrants is that supported by the Baron de Hirsch

Fund, and an especially interesting feature of this work has been that of inducing emigration from the crowded cities to agricultural districts. It must be confessed that no large diminution of city crowding has been made by these efforts; for, according to information gathered in 1909 by the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, which carries on the agricultural work of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, there were only about 15,000 Hebrews in rural communities all over the United States. The number of farms worked by Hebrews was said to be 2,701, and the number of farmers was 3,040. This society, realizing that attempts to colonize a non-agricultural people on cheap unimproved land cannot be expected to succeed, has recently made provision for instruction in farming on an experimental farm established in Long Island. This is in addition to the well-known farm schools in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

As far as the experiment in agricultural transplantation has gone with the Hebrew, it has been found to have a beneficial effect. There has been an especial improvement in physical health, and the ownership of land has developed independence, self-reliance and self-respect.

A more promising avenue of distribution of Hebrew immigrants, as far as numbers is concerned, is that along industrial rather than agricultural lines. The Industrial Removal Office has been engaged for the past eleven years in finding homes and employment outside of New York city for Hebrew immigrants and their families, mainly in industrial pursuits. During that period they have established 58,415 persons (of whom about 30,000 were wage-earners) in 1,388 cities and towns, 53,704 of the number being sent out by the New York office, and 4,711 by the Philadelphia and Boston branches. Of those sent out from New York, 31,638, or nearly 60%, went to the central states, 14% found homes in the Middle Atlantic, 13% in the western and 10% in the southern states.

The report of this society observes that the work of removal is difficult, owing to "the prejudice and timidity of our applicants regarding the unknown lands to which they were contemplating removing." Even with outside aid it takes the immigrant some time to make up his mind to move, as is seen from

the statement in the report that of the persons removed in 1911 over three-quarters had been in New York over three years. It is interesting to note that 21 % of the wage-earners distributed in ten years of activity followed the needle trades, and 30 % had no definite trade. This last group included peddlers. It is also interesting to find that less than 2 % of the removals made have turned out to be unsatisfactory or are still doubtful. Nearly all of the persons removed have remained and succeeded in the places to which they were originally sent.

An organization covering the field of immediate protection for arriving Jewish immigrants is the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. This society proposes to "keep track of each and every Jewish immigrant passing through the port of New York"—not only to see that they reach their destination in safety, but to look after their further welfare by way of helping to secure employment and discouraging settlement in congested cities. This society has found it comparatively easy to follow up the Jewish immigrants whose destination is outside of New York, and reports that "immigrants in the interior are all self-supporting, are eager to learn English, and bring even their babies to the kindergarten." But much more difficulty has been experienced in keeping in touch with the large mass who settle down in the city, either temporarily or permanently.

A strong organization, the Society for Italian Immigrants, enjoying a subvention from the Italian government in addition to a private subscription list, does a similar work for Italian immigrants. This society meets Italian immigrants at the pier, gives escort service and shelter, finds employment, looks after the transmission of money, and in short, takes the place of "next friend" to the newcomer in whatever way he needs it. During the year 1911, nearly 24,000 emigrants and immigrants were escorted, nearly 18,000 were lodged at the home of the society, and over \$28,000 of the immigrants' money was cared for or transmitted.

This society has furthermore taken a hand in the very necessary task of educating the illiterate immigrant. Under its auspices, the first schools in labor camps were started for instruction in English, and these schools have afforded not only

this necessary first step to good citizenship, but a useful social diversion to lonely men shut up in the unnatural surroundings of a temporary camp.

Of especial interest are the society's efforts to procure work for Italian immigrants and to assist in the process of distribution. This society is now the principal non-commercial employment exchange for Italians, having recently taken over the work of a labor bureau for Italians formerly under the auspices of the Italian government.

During the past year 3,493 immigrants applied for work at the society's bureau, and requests for 1,425 laborers were made, but only 528 laborers were actually placed. A light not only upon this misfit, but upon the whole question of the agricultural distribution of immigrants is thrown by the statement in the report for 1912 that

requests for Italian farm hands are persistent, but not of the kind any capable or intelligent Italian farm hand would accept. Wages and conditions offered are, as a rule, below any passable living standard, and the Italian farmer has grown to understand that unless a contract or a clear statement is offered him, he is often deprived of his legitimate earnings or taken advantage of in some way.

Other societies and individuals in the past have made efforts to transplant Italians to agricultural regions, but the net result of this work in numbers of persons settled is not large. Of all the Italian working men now in the country only a little over 6% are engaged in agricultural pursuits, although it is estimated that over 60% come from rural districts of Italy, where practically all were farmers or farm laborers. Throughout the country, however, are found agricultural settlements of Italians, many of them started by outside aid, ranging from groups of two or three households to three hundred and fifty households, which are prospering, and which serve as nuclei for further accretions.

A society calling itself the North American Civic League for Immigrants was started in 1908 with the ambitious purpose of looking after all the immigrants throughout the country, and of "doing all things which will result in making immigrants into efficient Americans." Its program includes protection,

education, distribution and assimilation, and is to be carried out by correlating the work of all agencies now busy among immigrants, rather than by doing direct work of its own.

In New York, the league has organized an immigrant guide and transfer system, has assisted in bringing immigrant children to the schools, has conducted investigations, and has made a survey of the New York laws affecting immigrants, with a view to the enforcement, repeal and amendment of such laws. It is difficult, however, to measure the actual accomplishment of this league in any very definite way, as its reports are more largely taken up with the evils to be combated than with results of the combat.

It must be plain after even so incomplete a sketch as the present that private organizations are not by any means covering the field of protection and distribution, though their activities are most creditable in view of the restricted means at their disposal.

It would seem that governmental bodies, with their greater resources and their more comprehensive powers of control, must be invoked to attain the greater accomplishment desired. This has recently been done by the creation in 1910 of a new bureau of industries and immigration in the state department of labor, to carry on for New York state the same big tasks with which the private organizations have been struggling. Unfortunately, the report of its first year's work seems to show a smaller record of accomplishment than the same year's work of the stronger private bodies.

One reason is obvious. Although the bureau has had laid upon it a multiplicity of mandatory duties, it was given, as its first year's appropriation, less than \$10,000, an amount less than one-third of the annual income of the Society for Italian Immigrants. Another reason is that too small a proportion of the bureau's work is directly administrative, and too much of its time has been taken up with investigations which served mainly to reveal conditions of abuse already familiar, and with scattering tasks of unofficial coöperation, the results of which cannot be seen or measured.

This bureau has succeeded, however, in securing greater

safety for immigrants' savings through the better regulation of immigrant banks, has brought under state control the employment agencies dealing chiefly with aliens, has registered and inspected homes and philanthropic organizations which distribute aliens, and has secured the passage of an immigrant lodging-place law, which is applicable to labor camps and will assist in reducing the evils which flourish in such communities.

The federal government itself has taken a hand in the general work through its newly-created division of information in the bureau of immigration. This division attempts to provide the entering immigrant with reliable information as to the country and its resources, which will help him to find his way to the interior of the country and secure employment. The division was organized under the Immigration Law of 1907, and has done a creditable amount of work since that time. In 1911, over 30,000 applicants received information for themselves and others, representing perhaps over 100,000 people helped by the division. Of the applicants for that year, 1,293 were Hebrews, and only 624 were Italians, while 1,629 were Danes, 1,568 Norwegians, 1,882 Swedes, 5,148 Germans and 5,211 Poles—the latter all peoples who naturally take to agriculture, and all, except the Poles, of the early immigration. During the year this division actually distributed 5,176 immigrants, of whom 1,127 were Germans and 1,044 were Poles. Only 51 Hebrews and 51 Italians were placed by this means.

It seems that even government bodies are not accomplishing a great deal in comparison with the mass of immigrants to be dealt with. What may be suggested as a more adequate means for meeting the situation than those now being employed?

Perhaps the surest method is a drastic restriction of immigration, so that we shall not be swamped by an ever-rising flood, while endeavoring to cope with the numbers already here. In the past the problem seemed simpler. It was thought that with an adequate entrance test, excluding undesirable immigrants, and with the great demand for unskilled labor caused by our developing industries, the immigrant once admitted could shift for himself, with no further damage to himself or the community than slight incidental disturbances arising in the course of adjustment.



We have come to see that adjustment is no such simple matter. The administration of entrance tests is a more or less wholesale affair, and is the work of a day or an hour or a minute, perhaps, for each immigrant. The work of protection and distribution after the immigrant arrives, on the other hand, must be intensive and individual; it must extend over periods of months or years.

If we cannot have restriction to help us catch up with our work, a measure of help to New York would be the diversion of immigration by government regulation of some sort, to other ports, nearer to the sparsely settled territory where immigrants are desired. In default of federal aid along this line, the state and the city may help by taking measures to distribute industries as well as laborers. It has been shown that the great attraction of the city to the immigrant is the opportunity for employment it offers. New York is not only a great trading center, it is also one of the greatest factory cities in the world, and the removal of a considerable proportion of the factories from crowded centers to suburban districts, through discriminating taxation or otherwise, would mean an automatic dispersion of our foreign working population. Other means are the improvements in transportation and housing that we need for our population at large, and finally, of course, a continued development of the agencies already at work, both public and private.